

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, it is very hard to believe that today marks exactly 2 months since I first came to the floor to advocate passage of the Senate's version of the Violence Against Women Act. I was very encouraged to see our body finally come together and eventually support this important legislation. The Violence Against Women Act has helped provide lifesaving assistance to hundreds of thousands of women and their families, and it certainly was a no-brainer to make sure all women had access to that assistance.

However, I was very disappointed to learn that, a day after we passed it, House Republicans pulled an immediate U-turn and introduced their version of the bill that would undo the commonsense progress we made. The House Republican version of VAWA is a giant step backward for victims of domestic violence. It is dangerous and irresponsible and leaves women across the country more vulnerable to domestic abuse. Not only do they remove important protections that would be created by the Senate version of the bill, they actually strip existing protections already provided by this important law. In fact, it removes critical protections for LGBT victims, does little to address the epidemic of domestic and sexual violence in tribal communities, removes critical protections already in place for students on college campuses, and it rolls back protections for immigrant victims.

We have made a lot of progress since VAWA was first passed back in 1994. I hope no one will insist on putting partisan politics ahead of protecting victims of domestic violence. Where a person lives, whom they love or what their citizenship status may be should not determine whether their perpetrators are brought to justice.

The Senate bill that we passed last month builds on what works in the current law, it improves what doesn't, and it continues on the path of reducing violence toward women. It certainly should not be controversial.

Mr. President, it is time for the House Republicans to come to their senses and support our bipartisan bill so that women and families in this country can get the resources and support they need.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF USDA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, I would like to recognize what Abraham Lincoln referred to as "the people's department"—the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

On this day 150 years ago, President Lincoln signed legislation to create the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At the beginning, USDA's focus was on agriculture research, farming techniques, and keeping statistics. Today, more than ever, the USDA is "the people's department." The USDA covers a broad range of issues that touch people's lives, from soil and water conservation to the school lunch program and from agriculture trade to expanding rural broadband services.

Through the efforts of USDA over the past 150 years, agriculture has become one of the most successful sectors in the U.S. economy. Agriculture accounts for 1 in 12 American jobs and provides our country with 86 percent of the food we consume. In 2011, agriculture trade set records by exporting nearly \$140 billion in U.S. farm exports.

The USDA has worked to develop rural communities, conserve the environment, and ensure that people across the country have access to safe and healthy food choices. In rural communities, USDA has given money to improve health care facilities, grants to assist families purchase or refinance homes, and investments to secure broadband services. USDA has worked to protect critical wetlands habitats, National Forests, and water and soil. And USDA ensures the health and safety of Americans by providing nutrition assistance through SNAP payments, reforming the school lunch program, and adopting tougher standards for E. coli and Salmonella in animal production.

Illinois has played a large part in the evolution of agriculture policy. President Lincoln gained his respect for agriculture from his time spent on farms and in rural communities around the state of Illinois as well as in Kentucky and Indiana. The same year President Lincoln began USDA, he also signed into law the Homestead Act and the Morrill Land Grant College Act. Illinois has also had two Secretaries of USDA—John Block, who served from 1981 until 1986, and Edward Madigan, who served from 1991 through 1993.

Over the past 150 years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has lived up to Lincoln's vision as a department for

the people. I hope USDA continues its commitment to improve agriculture, nutrition, and rural communities around the country and across the globe in the Department's next 150 years.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate the U.S. Department of Agriculture on 150 years of service to the people of America.

On this day in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln created the Bureau of Agriculture and with it, America's commitment to an abundant supply of food and fiber. Lincoln grew up on a farm, and he understood the long hours of hard work that men and women like his parents spent working the land. Farming in those days was a very different proposition—much of the work was done by hand or animal labor. He rightly called it the People's Department because 90 percent of Americans at the time worked, like his folks, on farms.

Lincoln created the USDA at a time of great change in agriculture. Machinery was being introduced that lessened the workload and made farming more efficient. Families were heading westward and expanding the frontier. It was only 5 days later that Lincoln signed another important law that would have a dramatic effect on the future of agriculture in this country: the Homestead Act. That same year, Lincoln would also sign the law creating the Transcontinental Railroad, as well as the Land Grant Colleges Act, which has special meaning for me as a Michigan State University graduate.

But here is the most amazing thing: he did all of this during some of the worst fighting of the Civil War.

When he put pen to paper to create the Bureau of Agriculture, there had already been more than 100,000 casualties in the Civil War. He created all of these institutions that would have a lasting impact on this great Nation at a time when many people wondered how long this Nation could survive.

Mr. President, 150 years ago, in his address to Congress, Lincoln said, "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us in honor or dishonor to the last generation."

President Lincoln rose to the challenge. He saved the Union, and he created lasting institutions that are still with us and making a difference today.

If he could do all that in the middle of the Civil War, with enemy troops camped just across the river, what challenge can't we face today?

In the Agriculture Committee, we came together last month to pass, with an overwhelming bipartisan vote, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act, or the farm bill. This is a bill we pass every 5 years to renew America's agriculture policy and to continue the important work of the Department of Agriculture.

It is critical that we pass the farm bill before the current bill expires in September. We passed a very strong